



School Health Index

for Physical Activity, Healthy Eating,
and a Tobacco-Free Lifestyle

A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide

Elementary School
2002



Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention (CDC)
Atlanta GA 30341-3724

School Health Index - Elementary School

Dear School Health Advocate:

Enclosed is a complimentary copy of the "School Health Index for Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, and a Tobacco-Free Lifestyle: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide". This tool can help your school assess and improve its physical activity, healthy eating, and tobacco-use prevention policies and programs. The improvements recommended as a result of the School Health Index can be used as part of your School Improvement Plan. The Index was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in partnership with school health experts, school administrators and staff, parents, and national education and health organizations.

Look at what school administrators and staff are saying about the Index.

- *"The School Health Index was easy to use and enabled us to clearly identify what is working and what needs to be improved."*
- *"It's a real energizer- it makes you think of coming up with ideas which are relatively easy to implement."*
- *"The school staff had a very positive attitude toward the Index. They liked the comprehensive view of health promotion in the Index, including the use of many different types of stakeholders."*
- *"Many teams became excited as they went through the process . . . parents became deeply involved and devoted to implementing the recommendations."*

Please take a moment to review the School Health Index. As you will see, it's a simple, straight forward questionnaire that gives administrators, staff, parents, and students a chance to get involved and work together to create a healthier school. A small investment of time can pay big dividends in improving the health and well-being of students and their readiness to learn.

We wish you success in your efforts to improve the health of students.

Sincerely,

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The original version of this document, *The School Health Index for Physical Activity and Healthy Eating: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide*, was published in 2000.

Copies can be obtained in any of the following ways:

- Download from CDC's web site:
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/SHI/index.htm>
- Request by e-mail: HealthyYouth@cdc.gov
- Call toll-free: 888-231-6405
- Request by toll-free fax: 888-282-7681

When ordering, please specify either the elementary school version or the middle school/high school version.

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SCHOOL HEALTH INDEX – ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

This document was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Adolescent and School Health, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity, and Office on Smoking and Health.

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**School Health Index for Physical Activity, Healthy Eating,
and a Tobacco-Free Lifestyle:
A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide**

Introduction

Promoting healthy behaviors among students is an important part of the fundamental mission of schools: to provide young people with the knowledge and skills they need to become healthy and productive adults. Improving student health can

- increase students' capacity to learn,
- reduce absenteeism, and
- improve physical fitness and mental alertness.

The *School Health Index* is a self-assessment and planning guide developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that will enable you to

- identify the strengths and weaknesses of your school's health promotion policies and programs,
- develop an action plan for improving student health, and
- involve teachers, parents, students, and the community in improving school policies, programs, and services.

The policies and practices recommended in the *School Health Index* are derived from a series of guidelines for school health programs published by CDC.

The *School Health Index* is designed for use at the school level. However, with appropriate adaptation, it could be used at the district level, especially if the district has only a few schools and those schools have similar policies and practices.

Focus on Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, and a Tobacco-Free Lifestyle

This version of the *School Health Index* addresses school policies and programs related to physical activity, healthy eating, and a tobacco-free lifestyle. Future versions will address all six of the behaviors that account for most of the serious illnesses and premature deaths in the United States, as well as other important health issues such as skin cancer, asthma, and food safety (see box).

The Six Key Health Risk Behaviors for Children and Adolescents

Good school health programs need to address each of the following behaviors:

- Physical inactivity
- Poor eating habits
- Tobacco use
- Behaviors that result in intentional or unintentional injury
- Abuse of alcohol and other drugs
- Sexual behaviors that result in HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases, or unintended pregnancy

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Regular physical activity, healthy eating, and being tobacco-free help young people stay in shape, feel good, do their best at school, and avoid developing conditions that can eventually lead to heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. Unfortunately, most young people don't meet physical activity and nutrition recommendations, more children and adolescents are overweight than ever before, and more than one in three high school students has used some kind of tobacco product in the last month (see Fact Sheet on pages 7-8).

Big Dividends

The *School Health Index* is available at no cost, and the assessment process can be completed in as little as five hours. Many of the improvements you will want to make after completing the *Index* can be done with existing staff and with few or no new resources. A small investment of time can pay big dividends in students' improved health, well-being, and readiness to learn.

Fact Sheet on Physical Activity, Healthy Eating, and a Tobacco-Free Lifestyle

Long-Term Benefits

- Physical activity, healthy eating, and a tobacco-free lifestyle help prevent premature deaths due to heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes.
- Physical inactivity and poor eating habits together account for at least 300,000 deaths each year among U.S. adults.
- Smoking causes more than 400,000 premature deaths each year.

Other Benefits of Regular Physical Activity

- Helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles.
- Helps control weight, build lean muscle, and reduce fat.
- Helps reduce feelings of depression and anxiety and promotes psychological well-being.

Other Benefits of a Tobacco-Free Lifestyle

- Helps maintain physical fitness.
- Helps maintain normal lung growth and resting heart rate.
- Helps prevent respiratory illnesses, coughs, and shortness of breath.
- May help reduce the likelihood of using alcohol and other drugs.

Food Intake and Academic Performance

- Research suggests that not having breakfast can affect children's intellectual performance.
- Participation in the School Breakfast Program can improve students' test scores and reduce their rates of absence and tardiness.
- Children from families that report multiple experiences of food insufficiency and hunger are more likely to show behavioral problems (such as hyperactivity and aggression), emotional problems (such as anxiety), and academic problems (such as absences and tardiness) than children from the same low-income communities whose families do not report experiences of hunger.

Excess Weight and Obesity

- The percentage of children who are overweight has nearly doubled, and the percentage of adolescents who are overweight has nearly tripled, since 1980.
- About 13% of children and 14% of adolescents are now overweight.

Youth Participation in Physical Activity

- In 2001, 31% of high school students did not engage in vigorous physical activity on a regular basis.
- About one-third of high school students attended daily physical education classes in 2001.
- Only 52% of high school students were enrolled in a physical education class in 2001.

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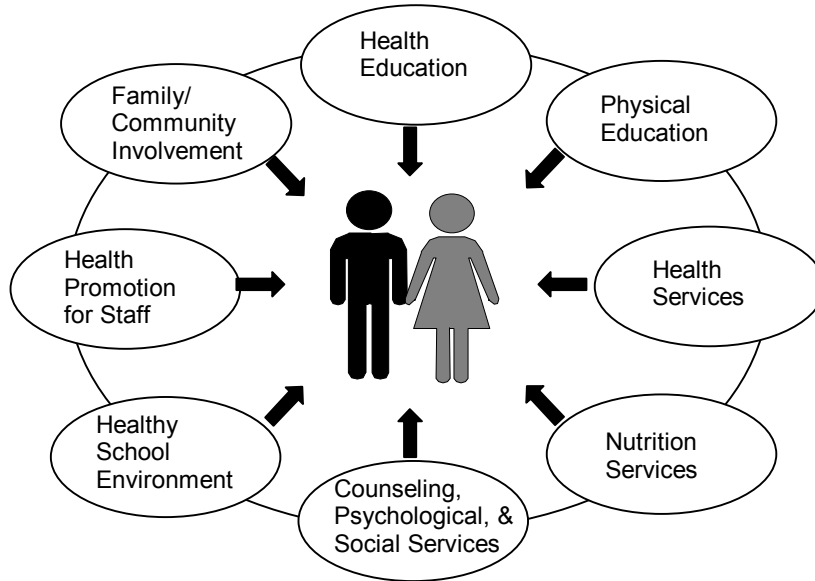
Percentage of Children and Adolescents (Ages 6–17) Who Meet Specific Dietary Recommendations*	
Recommendation	% Meeting Recommendation
Fat ($\leq 30\%$ of calories)	36%
Saturated fat ($< 10\%$ of calories)	32%
Fruits & vegetables (≥ 5 servings/day excluding fried potatoes and chips)	18%
*Unpublished CDC analysis of U.S. Department of Agriculture Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals, 1994-96.	

Youth Tobacco Use

- In 2000, one in seven (15%) middle-school students reported using some form of tobacco in the past month, and 11% reported current cigarette use.
- In 2000, one in three (35%) high-school students reported using some form of tobacco in the past month, and 28% were current cigarette smokers.

Instructions for Site Coordinator

1. **Review the eight modules.** Habits and practices related to physical activity, eating, and tobacco use are influenced by the entire school environment. The *School Health Index* therefore has eight different modules, each corresponding to one of the eight components of a coordinated school health program shown below.



2. **Assemble the *School Health Index* team.** Your first step toward a healthier school is to identify a team of people who will be responsible for completing the *School Health Index*. You may choose to (1) create a new team, (2) use an existing team, such as the School Health Council, or (3) create a new subcommittee of the school management council. Broad and diverse participation is important for meaningful assessment and successful planning and implementation.

Below are key people whom you may want to invite to join the *School Health Index* team. Choose people that you think are appropriate to represent your school and community.

Principal
Assistant principal
Health education teacher (s)
Physical education teacher (s)
Other teacher(s)
School food service manager
Parent(s)
Student(s)

School nurse or health care provider
School counselor, psychologist, social worker
Coach(es)
Community-based health care provider(s)
Community-based social services provider(s)
Community health agency representative(s) (for example, from the American Cancer Society or local health department)

3. **Meet with all members of the *School Health Index* team to discuss the Index and assign tasks.** At the first *School Health Index* team meeting (see sample agenda on page 16):

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- Explain the *School Health Index* (you can use the master overhead transparencies provided at the end of this section).
 - Make sure that all team members understand the importance of physical activity, healthy eating, and a tobacco-free lifestyle for young people. Completing the *Index* is not an academic exercise or a bureaucratic mandate; it is a process for bringing people together to improve a school's policies and programs. Team members should understand that their work on the *Index* can make a great difference in the lives of your school's students.
 - Form groups of two or more people to work on each of the eight modules, and set a deadline for completion of the work. It is very important to have two or more people on each module team, because having several people will increase accuracy and elicit a variety of creative insights for improving school programs, policies, and services. In dividing up the work, try not to overburden any individuals with too many assignments.
 - Have each module team select a coordinator.
 - Make photocopies of the following documents located in the sections for each module and give each module coordinator a clean copy of the documents for her/his module:
 - Instructions for Module Coordinator
 - module Score Card
 - module Questionnaire
 - module Planning Questions
 - Give each module coordinator a copy of the sample completed module Score Card and module Planning Questions at the end of this section (pages 13-15) so they will understand how to complete these forms.
 - Set a timeline for completing all the modules and holding the second *School Health Index* team meeting to complete the School Health Improvement Plan.
4. **Coordinate completion of the module documents by each module team.** Ensure that module team members work together to
- Answer the questions on the module Questionnaire by writing the results on the module Score Card.
 - Review the module Score Card results to answer the module Planning Questions.
 - Use the results from the third question in the Planning Questions to identify the one, two, or three highest priority actions that will be recommended to the *School Health Index* team for implementation this year.
 - Plan how they will present their results and recommendations for action to the entire *School Health Index* team.

For some modules this work will take just minutes, but for others it may take an hour or more.

5. **Complete the Overall Score Card.** Once all module teams have finished their work, collect each team's module Score Card and transfer the Module Scores to the Overall Score Card (located in the Planning for Improvement section, page 5).

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6. **Meet with all *School Health Index* team members to complete the School Health Improvement Plan.** At the second meeting of all *School Health Index* team members, do the following.
- Give a copy of the completed Overall Score Card to each participant.
 - Review the Overall Score Card results.
 - Have each module team present its results and its recommendations for action, using its completed Planning Questions.
 - Have all participants work together to identify the top-priority recommendations for the entire school and complete the School Health Improvement Plan (located in the Planning for Improvement section). Most schools will choose between two and four top-priority actions to implement per year. You may decide to produce a brief report that lists all the recommended actions in each module; this report can guide future planning efforts.
 - Discuss how you will monitor progress and when the team will meet again.

Tips for Completing the School Health Index

Accuracy counts. Please answer all questions as accurately as possible. The *School Health Index* is **your** school-based self-assessment and planning tool; it should not be used for auditing or punishing school staff.

The focus is on health promotion. The *School Health Index* is designed to assess implementation of health promotion activities across each of the eight school health components. It does not address basic administrative duties, such as bookkeeping.

There is no passing grade. The *School Health Index* is not intended to compare one school to another. You should use your *Index* scores only to help you understand your school's strengths and weaknesses and to develop an action plan for improving your health promotion efforts. It is realistic to expect low scores in certain areas; low scores will make you aware of areas that need improvement.

Some actions are easier than others. Use of the *School Health Index* tool might lead your team to recommend actions that require additional resources. You might find, however, that many of the recommended actions involve simply making better use of existing resources.

Keep the team together. The purpose of completing the *School Health Index* is to start on a path to improve your school's services. Once you have started, you can keep the team together and use the *Index* to monitor your progress. Establish a schedule for annual assessments, so that the *Index* can be a tool for continuous improvement and accountability over time.

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Sample Completed Score Card

Module 1: School Policies and Environment

Instructions

1. Carefully read and discuss the Module 1 Questionnaire, which contains complete questions and scoring descriptions for each item listed on this Score Card.
2. Circle the most appropriate score for each item.
3. After all questions have been scored, calculate the Module Score and complete the Module 1 Planning Questions.

		Fully in Place	Partially in Place	Under Develop- ment	Not in Place
1.1	Representative committee oversees school health programs	3	2	1	0
1.2	Written school health policies	3	2	1	0
1.3	Recess	3	2	1	0
1.4	Adequate physical activity facilities	3	2	1	0
1.5	Access to physical activity facilities outside school hours	3	2	1	0
1.6	Prohibit using physical activity as punishment	3	2	1	0
1.7	Prohibit use of food as a reward or punishment	3	2	1	0
1.8	Fund-raising efforts supportive of healthy eating	3	2	1	0
1.9	Restrict access to foods of low nutritive value	3	2	1	0
1.10	Adequate time to eat school meals	3	2	1	0
1.11	Hands washed before meals and snacks	3	2	1	0
1.12	Prohibit tobacco use among students	3	2	1	0
1.13	Prohibit tobacco use among staff	3	2	1	0
1.14	Prohibit tobacco use among visitors	3	2	1	0
1.15	Enforce tobacco-use policies	3	2	1	0
1.16	Prohibit tobacco advertising	3	2	1	0
1.17	Orient staff to school health policies	3	2	1	0
1.18	Communicate school health policies to students, parents, staff, and visitors	3	2	1	0

COLUMN TOTALS: For each column, add up the numbers that are circled and enter the sum in this row.

18	10	3	0
TOTAL POINTS: Add the four sums above and enter the total to the right.			31
MODULE SCORE = (Total Points / 54) X 100			57%

Sample Completed Planning Questions

Module 1: School Policies and Environment

The Module 1 Planning Questions will help your school use its *School Health Index* results to identify and prioritize changes that will improve policies and programs for promoting physical activity, healthy eating, and a tobacco-free lifestyle. The answers on this form should guide your module team's presentation to the entire *School Health Index* team.

Planning Question 1

Look back at the scores you assigned to each question. According to these scores, what are the strengths and the weaknesses of your school's policies and environment related to promoting physical activity, healthy eating, and a tobacco-free lifestyle?

Strengths

- (1) *Excellent physical activity facilities*
- (2) *Time for school meals*
- (3) *Strong policies on tobacco use for students and staff*
- (4) *Health committee in place*
- (5) *Some activities to enforce tobacco-free policies*

Weaknesses

- (1) *Lack of written policies*
- (2) *Allow use of physical activity for punishment*
- (3) *Lack of nutrition standards for competitive foods*
- (4) *Candy used too much for fund-raising*
- (5) *Weak tobacco policy for visitors*

Planning Question 2

For each of the weaknesses identified above, list several recommended actions to improve the school's scores (for example, create and maintain a school health committee).

- (1) *Get strong policies written, approved, communicated*
- (2) *Prohibit use of physical activity as punishment and food as reward*
- (3) *Set nutritional standards for competitive foods*
- (4) *Find alternatives to candy for fund-raising*
- (5) *Strengthen tobacco policy for visitors*

Continued on next page

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Planning Question 3: List each of the actions identified in question 2 above. Use the five-point scales defined below to rank each action on five dimensions (importance, cost, time, commitment, feasibility). Add the ranking points for each action to get total points. Use the total points to help you choose one, two, or three top-priority actions that you will recommend to the *School Health Index* team for implementation this year.

Importance	How important is the action to my school? 5 = Very important 3 = Moderately important 1 = Not important
Cost	How expensive would it be to plan and implement the action? 5 = Not expensive 3 = Moderately expensive 1 = Very expensive
Time	How much time and effort would it take to implement the action? 5 = Little or no time and effort 3 = Moderate time and effort 1 = Very great time and effort
Commitment	How enthusiastic would the school community be about implementing the action? 5 = Very enthusiastic 3 = Moderately enthusiastic 1 = Not enthusiastic
Feasibility	How difficult would it be to attain the action? 5 = Not difficult 3 = Moderately difficult 1 = Very difficult

Module 1 Actions	Importance	Cost	Time	Commitment	Feasibility	Total Points	Top-Priority Action?
<i>Get policies written and communicated</i>	4	4	2	2	3	15	
<i>Prohibit physical activity as punishment</i>	3	5	3	2	3	16	
<i>Alternatives for fund-raising</i>	3	3	2	2	3	16	
<i>Set nutritional standards</i>	5	2	3	4	4	18	✓
<i>New policy on tobacco use by visitors</i>	3	4	4	3	4	18	✓